

## MIDNIGHT RAMBLE

This is the middle class, lower. The tree on the lawn. Bushes in front of the house. Flowers in the yard. Lawn mowers growling. Dogs barking. Lots of dogs. Everyone has one, for safety, and they keep them locked up in their yards where they bark and bark behind their fences because no one ever takes them for a walk. Ice cream men. Lawn chairs. And beer and beer bellies and white paint on trim and brick and a hose at the side of the house. Squares, everything squares. Sidewalks and lawns and porches and houses and brains. TV sets. Garage sales and telephone poles. Kids sell koolaid in summer, shovel snow in winter. Till they're old enough to smoke and drink and raise hell. They get a couple years of that, then it's factory time. Always one lawn mower going. Because everyone on this street works in a factory and they're all on different shifts. Maybe they communicate through their lawns. Waking me here in the basement where I sleep. Eternal lawn mower of summer. I sleep in my parents' basement, a cave, dark, damp. Everyone around my age in the factory says they're not going to work there the rest of their lives. Just 'temporary.' The old guys laugh at that. They say Temporary my ass.

## EXPLORING

After parking my car in the East Lot, I head past the guard post, past the security cameras, past the sign listing the number of days since the last work-loss accident, stuck at 29 for weeks. Then into the locker room, with its large round sinks, and the hand cleaner that looks and feels like sawdust, and the old battered lockers, and the first whiff of the dark smell of grease.

When I first started, I got lost a few times just trying to find my way out at the end of my shift. Once I ended up at the wrong doors, the ones that attach the plant to the offices, the doors that go from noise and grit and darkness to clean, bright, quiet rooms where people dress nice and talk to each other in normal voices. Heads turned. I turned, back into the black noise.

The plant has its own hospital, its own store, its own railroad, its own streets, a main cafeteria and five satellites. It's so huge, so hard to find a way out.

— Jim Daniels

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